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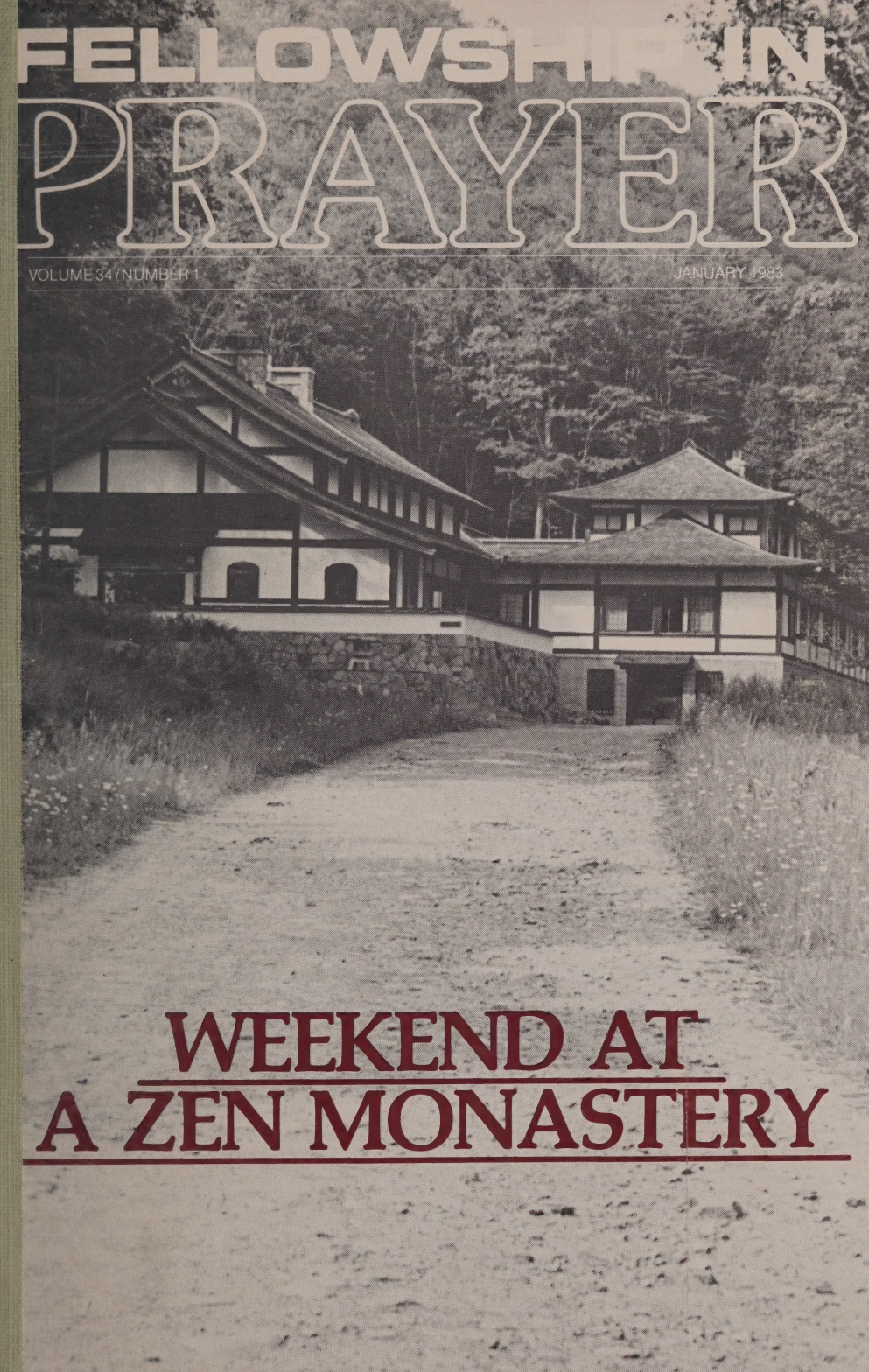

WEEKEND AT A ZEN MONASTERY

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THE COVER PHOTO is of the main building at Dai Bosatsu Zendo in Livingston Manor, N.Y., not far from Grossinger's famous hotel in the Catskills.

Interviews by JOHN S.D. GLAUS / Photographs by TOM DUNHAM

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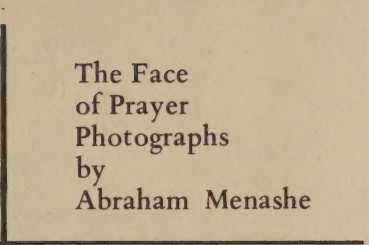

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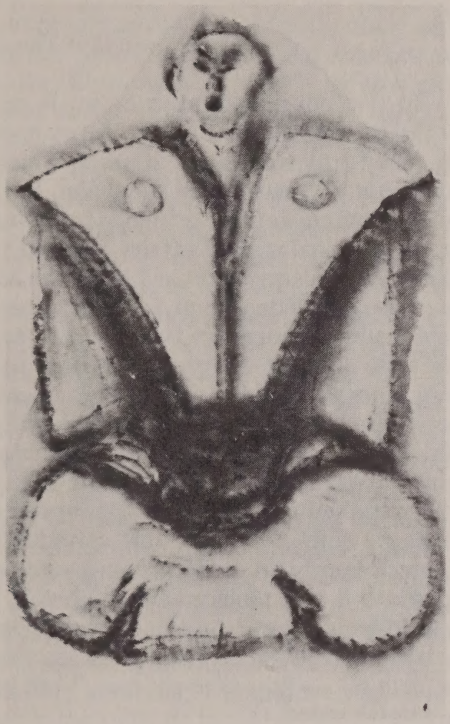
WEEKEND AT A ZEN MONASTERY



SEATED JAPANESE FIGURE by Mark Tobey (Seattle Art Museum)

Joshu asked Nansen, "What is the Path?"
Nansen replied, "Everyday life is the Path."
Joshu: "Can it be mastered?"
Nansen: "The more you try to master it, the more it will evade you."
Joshu: "If I do not try to master the Tao, how can I know it is the Path?"
Nansen: "The Path does not belong to the world of senses. Neither does it belong to a world absent of senses. Knowledge is a delusion and ignorance is senseless. If you want to attain the True Path, make yourself as vast and free as the sky. Name it neither good nor not good as you like."

With these words, Joshu was enlightened.

How enviable that enlightenment was achieved after so brief a conversa-

tion. But the comment succeeding this brief *koan* was that Joshu only had his eyes opened to reality, and that to sustain the moment of enlightenment he continued to practice, practice . . . ad infinitum.

> *Three faults, which are always found together and which infect every activity: laziness, vanity, cowardice. If one is too lazy to think, too vain to do a thing badly, too cowardly to admit it, one will never attain wisdom.*
>
> *— Cyril Connolly: The Unquiet Grave*

If there is any further consideration to be made on the three vices, it is that individually they are manageable, while if they appear simultaneously they are paralyzing. They provoke a sense of *angst,* which not only prevents me from doing good, not only warps my judgment, not only dampens my attempts to be virtuous, but poisons my existence from head to toe. Such was my frame of being, my personal state of affairs, prior to Tom Dunham's and my trip to Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji near Livingston Manor, N.Y. If anything was apparent on the day of departure, it was that there was a resounding dullness about my sensations. Ignorance, so it is said, as long as it is transparent is an original state of being and one which leads to knowledge. But to inflate oneself with poorly founded knowledge opens one's self-worth to erosion by anxiety. I had managed to read a great deal on Zen Buddhism, and although I did not consider myself knowledgeable on the subject, I certainly did not think I was ignorant. But because I felt that I knew something and that perhaps my self-esteem might be tampered with, the insidious fear of ridicule began its quiet gnawing at my confidence. Questions raced through my mind, precipitously, at ever-increasing rates of speed. If I could not answer the question, it was replaced by another. I had never been to the monastery, so what would I see? As I had never experienced a monastic community, what would I feel? Since I knew no one there, what questions would I ask? *Alea jacta est* — "the dice are cast," but how tragic it will be when I come back emptyhanded.

From the little I had managed to glean from the texts I had read, there, indelibly marked like some spot was the notion that Tom and I were going to be forced to perform that arduous task: *zazen. Zazen,* the masterful act of sitting in a crossed-legged position, until the blood ceases to flow to the lower extremities, one's legs numb and excruciating pain explodes in one's head, counting our breaths from one to ten, perfectly still for some excruciating period of time. I suppose that I am average in my ability to sit still — with a good book and a sofa, perhaps a few hours; counting my breaths, suppressing the desire to scream from pain, and fearful of the possibility of getting whacked for squirming, perhaps thirty seconds.

> *"Tout le malheur des hommes vient d'une seule chose, qui est de ne savoir pas demeurer en repos, dans une chambre." (The un-*

happiness of man resides in one thing, that he is unable to remain peacefully in a room.)

— Blaise Pascal: Les Pensees (circa 1660)

Pascal in his (in)finite wisdom was correct, yet the Buddhists, aware of this obstacle, have turned an obvious liability into their mainstay practice *zazen* — contemplative introspection until one dissolves into nothingness. Or in my case, a writhing mass of knotted pain. An irrevocable decision had been made and was now going into action. All defences were raised into strategic positions, all fortifications to fight off any attempts at proselytization or enlightenment were strengthened. If I was going to hoist myself on my own petard, I wanted to light the fuse.

The hot summer sun had reached its apex and had begun the slow climb down to more refreshing regions, when light and shadow diffuse and blend so gloriously with nature's colors. Summer was at its most pregnant time, all of nature's creatures were rushing about doing whatever these little creatures do, and the air was awash with the fanciful fragrance of wildflowers. Beneath the summer sky, tinted azure blue, a blue of magnificent and pristine clearness, the countryside stretched away. Slowly the road wound itself circuitously up and up, interspersed with an occasional hamlet here and there, all of which was offset by the loosely engirdling hills — they are known as the Catskills, supposedly mountains, but to me just beautiful hills — that arose against the horizon and married the sky with a fine monotonous roll. Despite the wondrous beauty of nature and the anxiety of unrequited expectation, Tom and I were particularly concerned, not so much with the possibility of enlightenment, nor the prospect of having to shave our heads or dress in outlandish garb, but with the simple and most important desire to satisfy our primordial need for proper sustenance. Was there a MacDonald's in the vicinity to which we might sneak to repair the damage of nuts and roots? How particularly vulgar, how very common, I thought, to be thinking of the state of our stomachs, when more spiritual thoughts should be sustaining us.

It was July, and there was a particular softness about the place. Nature when left to her own devices and desires — far from man's control — has a way of placing a tree here and a hedge there. Everything was heavy laden with full fresh leaf. When we made the last turn in the road, there spread before us in its gloriousness was Beecher Lake, upon whose surfaces not a ripple could be seen. It appeared as though some strange force had decreed there should reside perfect tranquility. Then off to the left, about one hundred yards from the lake, stands Dai Bosatsu. The monastery itself, is emphatically Japanese. Majestic, peaceful, inscrutably oriental. The timbers of the monastery delineate with perfect symmetry — oriental architecture is known for that — and yet all blends harmoniously with the surrounding environment. In 1976, the Deity of Dai Bosatsu Mountain was invoked:

"On behalf of all Sangha I ask your forgiveness for our destruction

and pollution of all rocks, trees, grasses and mosses and the nature of the Catskill Mountains, particularly by the Beecher Lake."
— Eido Roshi: Dai Bosatsu dedication.

And so it came to pass that the Deity of Dai Bosatsu Mountain graced this place. It is not the bucolic setting from which the atmosphere of peacefulness emanates but the setting is possessed of a tranquility which is undeniable.

We had made previous arrangements to stay at *Jorakuan*, the guest house, where we felt that we would best be able to do that work which we were there for, unimpeded by the monastic schedule. Sometime that evening we met the Shimano Eido Roshi, the abbot and guiding force of Dai Bosatsu.

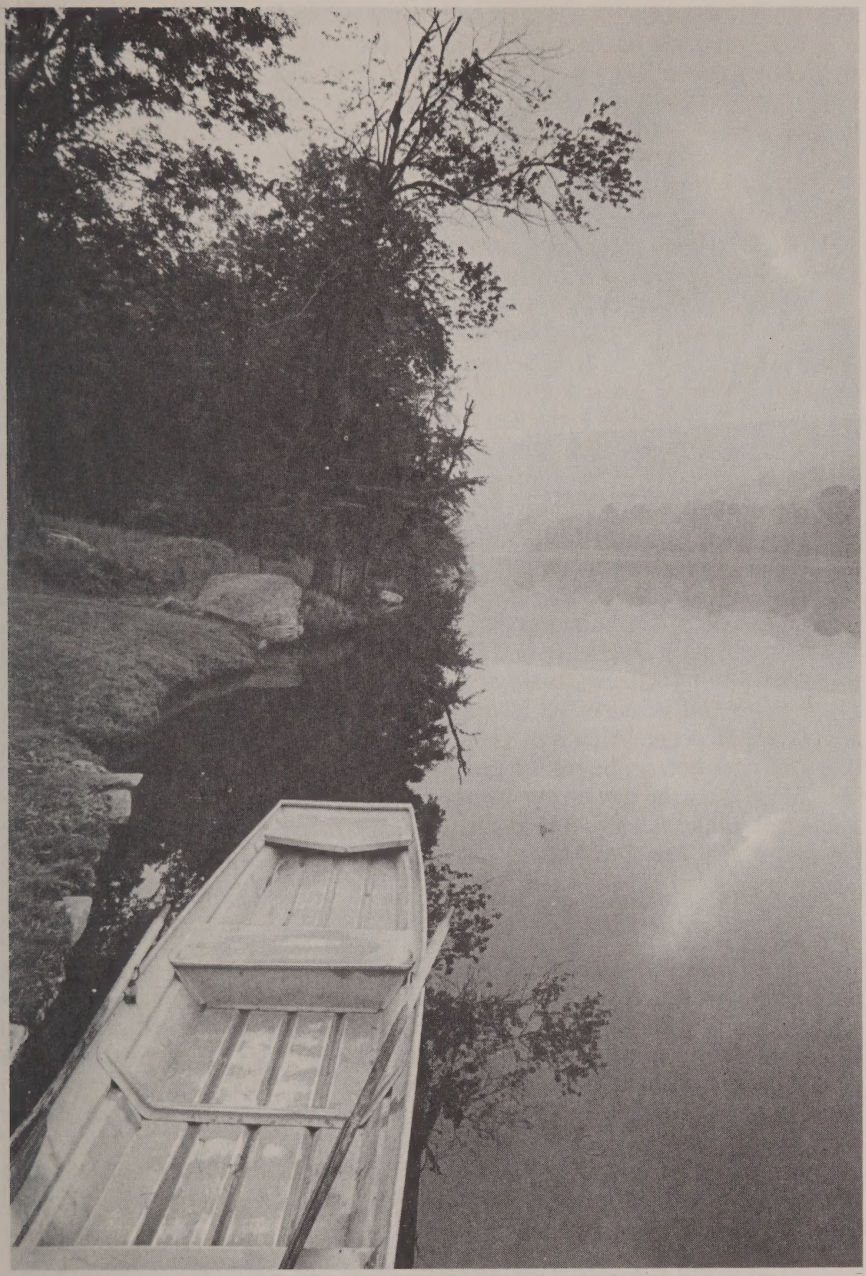
"I have never seen a man who had such creative quiet. It radiated from him as from the sun. His face was that of a man who knows about day and night, sky and sea and air. He did not speak about these things. He had no tongue to tell of them."
— J. Adler: On Paul Klee.

Our meeting with Eido Roshi was a magical event. He sat in the living-room of *Jorakuan* accompanied by one of the monks. His dress was oriental yet he sat and spoke in perfectly correct western style. Nothing of the dichotomy between the two cultures was apparent, everything blended well. He provided us with carte blanche — everyone and everything was at our disposal, but an underlying sense of discretion was implied without mention. Then the meeting was adjourned and we were left to our own initiative. I felt rather crestfallen. I had anticipated a schedule of events and a list of persons. I realize that at that moment that I was plunged into a *koan*. The *koan* was no longer an ephemeral question from the unknown. I saw myself being inexorably drawn into a swirling vortex of my own ineptitude, vacillation, and paralysis. For me it was no longer a question of thinking about an answer, it was *real, tangible,* part of my existence. It was "now."

The problem was how to approach these people. The fear that I might be treading on sacrosanct territory, barging in on crusades that were personal, private, hidden, and not to be discussed, overwhelmed me and infected my mood. This happened on the first evening of our arrival, seated around the dinner table (the vegetarian cuisine deserves a Michelin rating), in silence and full of dreadful mortification at the prospect of saying what we were doing there..

An immediate resolution: lose the stone, then all the rest will follow.

The Ballards were the first to speak of their presence at Dai Bosatsu. They had a son, Kanna, who had just been ordained a monk. How fortuitous! Was it luck or had I really lost the stone? Once they began, nothing more was required than that I sit back and listen. The Episcopalian Ballards then



Dai Bosatsu's unrippled "Beecher Lake" is named after the family of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who once lived there.

spoke candidly of their attempts to understand their son's desire to become a Zen Buddhist monk. Kanna was not present at the interview but came shortly thereafter to provide his side of the story. Kanna, searching for answers that a conventional career could not have provided, was ordained a monk, having arrived at the decision only after considerable anguish.

> Arnold Toynbee has predicted that future historians, when looking back on this period, will consider of major significance not events currently viewed as being of lasting importance, but rather an event few people are even aware of: the transmission of Buddhism from East to West. *O tempora! O mores!*

In quick succession, as I can now see in retrospect, things began to happen. Andrea Masters, an aspiring actress from New York City, told us of her first *sesshin,* her first intensive meditation retreat, and of the pain and revelation which ensued. Then there was Ben Mayock from Albany who found the attraction to Zen Buddhism irresistible, although his desire to remain secular inhibited his taking vows (but allowed him to work for the Zen Community in New York City). During an impromptu meeting, Denko, the monastery's head monk, was prompted by Soen Roshi, Eido Roshi's master, to recount his initial experience at a Japanese monastery. The account would have been bewildering, bordering on the ridiculous, for the uninitiated. For the initiated, though, the monologue was reminescent of the painfully amusing story of Janwillem van de Wetering's experience in *The Empty Mirror. Jorakuan's* resident director, Lee Milton — Genro — told of the path which has led him to a commitment not only to Dai Bosatsu but also to the New York City Zendo Shobo-ji for a number of years. Although Genro has intentions of reintegrating himself into the marketplace, he has no desire to cease his practice of *zazen.*

Finally, on the day of our departure, Eido Roshi spoke to us of what has happened to Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji since its dedication and of his hopes for the future. This Zen Master, this samurai is

> *"Repose, tranquility, stillness, inaction — all levels of the universe, the ultimate perfection of Tao."* — *Chuang Tzu*

Of my own personal experience, I can only say that the secret of happiness is to be in harmony with existence, to be always calm, always lucid, always willing, "to be joined to the universe without being more conscious of it than an idiot." The *yurodivy* (simpleton) in Moussorgsky's *Boris Godunov has always been a character bereft of admiration. For me, however, his intoxication is spiritual, not mental. He is unfettered by the chains which bind the lives of the free. He is as close to holy as anyone may aspire to be.*

Did I find something at Dai Bosatsu? I truthfully do not know. Perhaps one day, like Joshu, I too, shall be enlightened and my ignorance lifted. Perhaps up at Dai Bosatsu I found:

> *"The world is a school where the sleeping are woken up. I am now a little awake, so awake that I can never fall asleep again."*
>
> — J.S.D.G.

Seventy-five year old Nagakawa Soen Roshi has transmitted the "dharma succession" from Buddha himself to Shimano Eido Roshi.

Statue of Buddha seated on lotus is located on lake across from monastery.

"SOMETHING CALLED ZEN BUDDHISM"

Excerpts from a talk by Shimano Eido Roshi to Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji

This is going to be a talk on something which is called Zen Buddhism. I believe that there are two aspects to it. One of them we can call the practical aspect — that is, a day of no work is a day of no eating — which is, of course, very important. The second aspect is often overlooked. We call that aspect the spiritual or religious one. We cannot take only one aspect and ignore the other, but it is impossible to speak of the two aspects simultaneously. As there are plenty of opportunities to discuss or to talk about the practicality, I would like to present the mystical aspect of our life.

I am talking in three dimensions, using subject, verb, object, and this sentence structure makes sense only when we listen from a three-dimensional, rational, commonsense, practical point of view. We have to use this three-dimensional structure — subject, verb, object, past, present, future, here, there, you, me, etc. — to talk about the mystical aspect. By borrowing such rational language, we are deceived into believing that the mystical aspect can also be spoken or thought of in a three-dimensional way. That is the first mistake we often make. So let us be limber in our acceptance.

At the beginning of the dedication ceremony for Dai Bosatsu Day, I had to chant, *"Namu Dai Bosa."* This was for the whole universe. Whether you know it or not, your brain is satisfied by the good nature which pervades the universe. But in reality one does not need to mention the whole universe, it may be superfluous to mention the whole universe. Perhaps all that is needed is good nature. But then our brain cries out, "What does it mean?" Then we try to explain, and the more we try to explain, the more we go into the three-dimensional world, instead of the other way around. This is indeed a dilemma.

It will remain a dilemma as long as we try to understand it with our intellect. However, it ceases to be a dilemma if we try to understand it through what is called our "intuition." There are many nice words in the three-dimensional world such as "think," "realize," and "understand." But none of them are correct. Somehow, all of a sudden it is as if your experience opens the narrow-minded view and after that our point of view towards life will be completely different.

In an attempt to explain this, let us start with time. Time has three aspects: past, present, and future. Yesterday is past, today is the present, and tomorrow is the future. But let us imagine that we have a clock, and that here we draw a line when today passes into tomorrow. We sit and wait. Midnight draws nearer. Finally it is midnight, and then five past midnight, but no one is quite sure when the line was crossed from today into tomorrow

or from yesterday into today. In other words, there is only the present. However, in reality we cannot live in the past or future, but only in the present and we are *always* in the present. To understand this concept is very important.

It is likewise with the concept of space. We often say, "I am here, and you are there." It is a correct statement. I am here, and you are there, and somehow at one point here has to become there, and where that is, nobody knows. And yet, you are obviously there and I am obviously here, and nobody knows where to draw the line. In the three-dimensional world it is necessary to make such distinctions. But in the endless world, the mystical world, or spiritual world, only "here" exists. So now we know that there are certain disadvantages in speaking. No matter how much I try, no matter how much I speak, I am required to use certain images and forms of communication which keep us in the three-dimensional world.

Somehow we have been led, with obvious reason to be here in this particular spot, and to do something. To be ignorant is also good, for the less you know the better. You have come here knowing nothing, and you are asked to sit, asked not to move. By doing so thoughts come and go. Doubts appear and disappear. When one *zazen* sitting is over, somehow one feels better. So all that can be asked is to repeat, repeat, repeat. Not knowing what one is doing is half of self-realization. What eventually occurs is that time-lessness, past-lessness, future-lessness, there-ness, here-ness, you-ness, and me-ness have no meaning whatsoever. Sit, sit, sit, and expect nothing, and all will happen, because nothing will happen.

I recently received a long letter from an individual who knows nothing about Buddhism, nothing about Zen, and has practiced *zazen* only three times at the New York City Zendo. This person speaks of an irresistible attraction to Zen, which cannot be rationalized. This is not an uncommon experience, probably many of you have experienced this. Perhaps at one point many of you sensed that there was something, that there had occurred some change and yet there was no change at all. This kind of feeling comes and goes. This is one aspect.

The second aspect is rather more unusual. It has something to do with a previous life. There are three categories into which our thinking of life falls. Firstly, there are those who believe that there has been a past life, and there will be a future one. Then there are those who are suspicious of such thinking. And then there are those who believe that there is neither one nor the other, but only the one life — the present one. The fact is that there is only *one* life, there is but one form: the being as me right now and the being as you right now. It shall pass that you and I will disappear, but the one life will never cease. It is not the question whether there was a past life or a future life. There cannot be anything else but the *one* life. That is the only thing which exists. The reasons why we find it difficult to understand this is that we are deceived by the different manifestations which pursue us through this life and take us off the path. Because of

these manifestations we overlook this one life. If we fully understand the meaning of this *one* life, then the fear of death and all other fears disappear. Somehow this all becomes possible to understand when we practice *zazen*. Through the effect of *zazen* practice, we can clearly see, very clearly see, what was, and is, and what shall be, because they are all *one*.

Once again, this becomes difficult to explain in three-dimensional language because it defies rationalization. But I shall continue to try. Many people disagree on the concept of past life, future life, pointing out that this is a tiny, tiny planet. It is such a tiny planet in such a large solar system. Through the *zazen* practice, we can see what was a past life. That there existed some special relationship between one individual and another individual at *that* time being manifested into two forms at that time. And, the mutual attraction or mutual hatred or one-sided attraction or onesided hatred continues to exist. But two individuals at that time, and in this lifetime, naturally had different faces and names, nationalities, and ages. But for *some* reason, this mysterious attraction or intimacy is irrational and unexplainable. But it does exist. But I am convinced and I know that there is such a thing which everybody has still, or will eventually have.

Anyhow, returning to my friend who wrote the long letter, she could not figure out in a three-dimensional way how she became so attracted to the Dai Bosatsu Zendo. She could not explain the attraction to do *zazen*, for there is nothing in her past which explains it. She has a Christian background and is a very well educated person with a degree from Tokyo University. Naturally the question is why? What happened recently with this person was something for which there is no word to explain. Even in Japanese there is no word; however the closest one is *"Kan Toku." Kan* means to "feel" and *Toku* means to "attain." Anyhow, the past appeared in front of her. She became the past, and the past became the present. In one instant, she realized what was happening. She knew the answers to the questions which were not questions, for they were answers which needed to be realized. She had no other choice. This makes absolute sense, and it is not at all mysterious or irrational. To believe that rational is rational is crazy.

Just one month ago today, six dharma brothers became Buddhist monks. If we look at this phenomenon in a three-dimensional way, we may say, "Oh, he shaved his head," or "He became a monk." Under those circumstances it would be possible to pass judgment or to criticize. But it is more than that. They became monks because they could not exercise any other choice. There was no choice to be made. For those six dharma brothers, it is their first experience as monks in this lifetime. And who knows? Perhaps in the next life you, too, may be monks or nuns as a result of your presence here today at the Dai Bosatsu Zendo. It is too late to run away. For it is more than a matter of personal preference or dislike. It is a matter of Zen.

LEE / "GENRO" ON ENLIGHTENMENT

FIP: Are you an enlightened being?

LEE: Mu!

FIP: I suppose that there would be insufficient time to consider what Joshu's "Mu" means to you, so perhaps we ought to start at the beginning. What were the circumstances which led you to your coming to Dai Bosatsu?

LEE: Before I begin, allow me to answer simply the meaning of enlightenment. First of all, my answer to the meaning of enlightenment when I first approached Zen eight years ago was certainly different than it is today. Whereas eight years ago I might have provided you with an intellectual answer, today I proffer the understanding that all sentient and non-sentient beings are enlightened.

But let me start at what I consider the beginning and we shall see how I arrived here. Firstly, my religious upbringing was definitely instilled by my father, who was an Episcopalian minister. Although he was very dedicated to the church, he decided to leave his family. So from my very earliest recollections, there seemed to have been a great void, one which was created by the absence of a father-figure in my life. My mother did the best she could. However, there was an enormous amount of moving from one place to another. This greatly affected my sense of belonging and created a desire to stay rooted in one area.

FIP: Do you feel that this rootlessness was a cause of unhappiness?

LEE: It appears that a child has qualities which enable him to continue despite many difficulties which he may encounter. It is only as we grow older and begin to lose those childlike qualities that we begin to experience difficulties. Unless we are sustained and nurtured, we misplace the innocence, the faith, and the trust. A sort of icy cynicism pervades our every move in life. So until the moment I arrived at college, I feel that I was able to postpone facing the implications of how lonely I was and how much I was in need of a sense of well-being.

FIP: Did your studies at college help relieve this despondency?

LEE: I felt that I should study that subject which provided the most comfort, and I expected English literature to give me those answers. I simply could not find the answers in either verse or prose. I remained unsatisfied. I could never reconcile myself with a faith as I had somehow not been able to understand what my father had done. How could a man of the church leave his family? It was a question of his own judgment which had serious implications. I could not allow myself any faith in a power of any sort. At that age, one is confronted with all types of problems and questions. Why are we on this planet? Who are we? and where are we going? The basic questions which have no answers, yet they constantly gnaw and erode at our fundamental sense of existence.

By the time I left college, I was well on my way, on a sort of individual crusade of the imagination, to finding answers for these questions. I have always been an imaginative type, so it was natural for me to explore and search for the meaning of life through the vehicle of the imagination. What I realize now, however, which I did not know then, was the fact that the imagination is the source of our delusions, it is the area where myths are created not where they are understood. So for about four years, I twisted and turned all of the answers into convenient replies, ones which I could be satisfied with. They were not necessarily true.

FIP: What were you doing at this time?

LEE: I was in and out of graduate school and was married. I see now that my marriage was a need to be rooted, yet I was not ready for that. I had been married for about five years and decided that I had insufficient experience for that, so I broke away, and divorced my wife. It was not a particularly responsible thing to do, but it was a matter of survival. So with my married life behind me, I began the proverbial "finding myself" period, which lasted approximately seven years. It was a process of futility, for I see that the more I sought the less I found. I became despairing, which eventually left me desperate. I was not entirely without something to do. I was working on a novel, which I see in retrospect was nothing more than an autobiographical sketch. I liken this search somewhat to Ionesco's characters in search of an author, except that mine was a man in search of his life.

This was like leaping into a labyrinth. Life was full of pitfalls, illusions, the path was never straight, always circuitous. Around every corner there appeared another set of problems which seemed to require more energy than I possessed. I continued my travels and eventually arrived in New York City. Yet being in New York provided me with no suitable answers. I seemed to be getting deeper and deeper into myself. My waking and sleeping moments were now a source of deep anxiety. I was plummeting deeper into myself and yet there was no relief. I was still sure that there was an answer. Then, out of the clear blue, there arrived, somehow — one never really sees how it happens — Kapleau's *The Three Pillars of Zen.*

FIP: Did the reading make an immediate effect on your life?

LEE: The more I read, the more I realized that I had a great deal in common with these people and their experiences. As I continued to read, I began to experience an awakening. I started to get more deeply involved with the readings, and eventually I started *zazen*. There were instructions in Kapleau's book and I followed them. Then after a few weeks of *zazen*, I began to feel a glorious daze.

FIP: How long ago was that?

LEE: It was about eight years ago. I am amazed that the time has passed so quickly. However, what impresses me is that I have remained faithful to the discipline of *zazen*. At first, it was extremely difficult and painful. Then someone told me about the New York City Zendo, so I went there one Thursday night and sat in their *zendo*, and suddenly realized that I was in the right place. At that time, Dai Bosatsu was just being built, and because of my interest in Zen, I decided to come up and help them as best I could. That was the moment of my first encounter with Dai Bosatsu. Then, about a year after that, I came for my first *sesshin.*

FIP: Had you made a decision at any time to commit yourself to Zen?

Zendo (meditation hall) at Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji

LEE: As it is with most things that are relatively new, I decided — actually, I played with the idea of coming to live at the monastery. I also considered becoming a monk, but I knew that I did not possess sufficient vocation to make that type of commitment. There was something very appealing in the possibility of becoming a monk. Enthusiasm is very powerful. But if one takes the opportunity of letting time pass and being honest about the total involvement that is required, one begins to be honest about the implications. I also realize now that there were a series of problems that had not yet been resolved. A very important one was the fact that I have a child from my marriage and I am very dedicated to that child. To embrace the monastic life would have demanded — if not the renunciation — it would have asked me to place to the side my commitment to that child, at least for a number of years. I had no intentions of doing so. However, I have been deeply involved with the monastery. I have been directly associated with it for over four years, and now I am leaving.

FIP: Is there a reason for any discontentment?

LEE: That is exactly what it is not. I have never had a more stressless, tranquil frame of mind, and this is inherently bound up with the question of enlightenment. I shall try to explain as simply as I can. I have been a resident here at the monastery for a number of years. I have alternated that time with certain responsibilities at the New York City Zendo Shobo-ji as their resident director. During the summer months, I would come up to Dai Bosatsu and take care of *Jorakuan* — the guest house. This year I have decided to take a sabbatical. It may, however, be more permanent than that. I may leave the community altogether. This all ties in very well with the sense of enlightenment. To be enlightened means to be raised to another plane of consciousness. Enlightenment is also the three poisons. The poison of greed, anger, and ignorance.

FIP: Can you explain how enlightenment has now become a poison?

LEE: Enlightenment is greed: "However innumerable all beings are, I vow to enlighten them all." By doing this, I too will become enlightened. Enlightenment is anger, anger at all delusions. And enlightenment is ignorance, for to not know is to know.

All of this is very much a part of where I am today, and I have to be grateful that I have found my path, and the path is Zen. Zen is nothing more than knowing who you are and what you are capable of doing. So, armed with that knowledge, I shall now spend my time in New York, pursuing a career and attempting to reintegrate myself into the marketplace.

FIP: Do you mean that after the long search for Zen you are going to give it all up?

LEE: What is there to give up?

JOSHU'S MU

THE KOAN

A monk asked Joshu, "Has a dog Buddha nature or not?" Joshu said, "Mu!"

MUMON'S COMMENT

TO REALIZE ZEN one has to pass through the barrier of the Patriarchs. Enlightenment follows when the road of thinking ceases. If you do not pass the barrier of the Patriarchs, or if your road of thinking does not cease, then no matter what you think, no matter what you do, you are like a tangling ghost. You may ask, "What is the barrier of the Patriarchs?" This one word, "Mu," is it. This is the barrier of Zen. If you pass through it, you will see Joshu face to face. Then you can walk hand-in-hand with the whole line of Patriarchs. Is this not a pleasant thing to do? If you want to pass this barrier, you must work through every bone in your body, through every pore of your skin. You must become filled with the question, "What is Mu?" Carry it with you day and night. Do not believe that it is the common negative syllable meaning "nothing." It is not nothingness, the opposite of existence. If you really want to pass this barrier, you should feel as if you had a hot iron ball embedded in your throat. You can neither swallow it nor spit it out. Then your previous lesser knowledge disappears. Like a fruit ripening in season, your subjectivity and objectivity naturally become one. You are like a dumb man who has had a dream. Your ego shell is crushed and you can shake the heaven and move the earth. You are like a great warrior holding a sharp sword. If a Buddha stands in your way, cut him down. If a Patriarch blocks your way, kill him. You will be free from birth and death. You will be able to enter any world as if it were your own playground. I will tell you how to do this with this koan. Just concentrate your whole energy into this Mu, and do not allow any disruptions to sway you. When you enter this Mu and there are no disruptions, your attainment will be like a burning candle illuminating the whole universe.

BEN MAYOCK:
"Practice, Practice, Practice"

FIP: When were you first introduced to a sense that there was more than self-will which determined man's path in life?

BEN: As far back as I can remember, I was constantly aware that there was a superior entity, which I called God. I always remember asking myself, Where is God? What is God? But I never received sufficient information to answer these questions. I am a Catholic and I am grateful to the Catholic Church for some of its answers, but I found that the liturgy and ceremony contained too many mysteries for me to understand. Now I look for similarities between Zen and Catholicism.

FIP: Were you formally introduced to Zen Buddhism?

BEN: When I was at school in New Hampshire, I was given a text to read for a course I was taking on religion and western civilization called *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* by Paul Reps. I read it and was impressed. I had finally come across a religion which, by not making any sense, made sense.

FIP: How did you manage to hear about Dai Bosatsu?

BEN: I read about it in the *New York Times* magazine, and by that time I was interested enough in Zen to find out more about it. I wrote to the monastery and they forwarded information.

It must have happened in the spring of 1977. I went on a fishing trip with a friend of mine and on our way back to Albany we stopped here at the monastery to check the place out. What I saw I liked. I had never come across a place quite like it. So peaceful and tranquil. Unfortunately, my friend did not experience the setting in quite the same way. He could not wait to leave.

We only stayed for the afternoon. But I was so impressed with the setting and the atmosphere that I knew I would return. Then, about a month later, I returned to spend a weekend and to learn whether or not a Zen life-style was compatible to me. What I found out was that I could not sit still. That was extremely depressing. However, I enjoyed the vegetarian food, so all was not lost that first weekend.

FIP: When you came for the weekend did you sign up for a *sesshin?*

BEN: No, I simply signed up to spend a weekend intensive to find out what the lifestyle would be. I was, however, well aware what was going to happen. But since I had never practiced *zazen* before, I could not anticipate the results until I had experienced it. There happens to be a word which circulates around here; that word is "realization." It is one thing to understand the fact that New York is a city, but one must go there to experience it. It was for the same reasons that I came on my first weekend to the monastery. I had read about it, but I wanted to experience it.

FIP: Do you remember what your first *zazen* was like?

BEN: I remember that we had to rise very early in the morning; the sun was not yet up. We scurried as best we could in the time we had to the dharma hall to begin chanting. I could not find my place in the *sutra* book, and I did the best I could. When the chanting was over and we proceeded into the *zendo*, I realized that the moment had come. I sat as I had been shown and started to count my breaths, from one to ten. I hoped that something would happen. Nothing did. All I remember was that I tried to sit still and could not stop squirming.

FIP: How did you feel after the first weekend?

BEN: I felt that I wanted to come back. I also wanted to continue *zazen*, despite the fact that it had not fully lived up to my expectations. So when I returned home, I continued to sit and practice my *zazen* for at least twenty minutes a day. Then one day I decided to come up for a *sesshin,* which is the more intensive meditation weekend. I was not entirely sure what I had signed myself up for, nor was I aware of the schedule. I knew that there would be a focus on *zazen*, but I did not realize that there would be so much. It was brutal. It was painful. However, I discovered that it released some energy which existed inside — trapped. The *sesshin* released that energy which I was not aware that I possessed.

FIP: How long did this energy stay with you?

BEN: This source of energy stayed with me for about five or six weeks. I remember feeling energized all the time. But it was not the type of energy we feel after a good night's sleep, for example. It was a glowing, radiant type of energy. The other thing I remember about this energy is that it emanated from a different source than anything I had previously experienced. It seemed to come right from my guts, from the very core of my existence.

FIP: There have been two common denominators which people have been talking about. One has been the sense of energy experienced after *zazen,* and the other has been the conflict which arises concerning whether or not to continue the practice of Zen. Have you resolved this?

BEN: I took the practice of Zen very seriously right from the very start. In fact, I stayed here at the monastery for six months for *kessei*, which is an extended period of intensive training in Zen leading to the total adoption of Zen and possibly to ordination as a monk. It usually lasts three months, but I decided to stay for six. During that period I felt I was doing something really worthwhile with my life. But sometime during that period there was the question, a lingering doubt in the back of my mind, that I would not be able to live a real life with a real job and continue my Zen practice. To resolve that conflict I got a job, only to realize that that was not what I wanted. I found that I wanted to practice *zazen.*

FIP: How have you managed to incorporate a job and Zen in your life?

BEN: I decided to live at the Greyston Seminary in Riverdale, New York, since I wanted to continue my Zen practice on a regular basis and have a job. The community there found a spot for me. I work for the Zen community and practice regularly. I felt that it was better for me to hold a job in a place where I would feel accepted, rather than doing something which I would not enjoy. So at this moment I am employed and I have a livelihood which supports me. I have the right livelihood, and Zen complements it very nicely. I have found that, irrespective of the situation in which I find myself, my Zen will help me. But not everything I do will help my Zen. The goal that I have set for myself is to quiet my mind, to bring it to perfect stillness. To attempt to accomplish that I must work very hard. It is not easy. To do that properly one must work hard on oneself, constantly striving to be a better person. One must quiet the villain inside. If not, then one becomes separated from the rest of the world. That is the meaning, at least for me, of separateness. One must persistently strive to be a better person. Doing this is conforming to the basic precepts of Buddhism. They are: think no evil thoughts, do only good acts, keep the body cold and the mind warm. It consists of practice, practice, and more practice. Practice whatever you do. Practice breathing, practice good living, and especially practice your *zazen.*

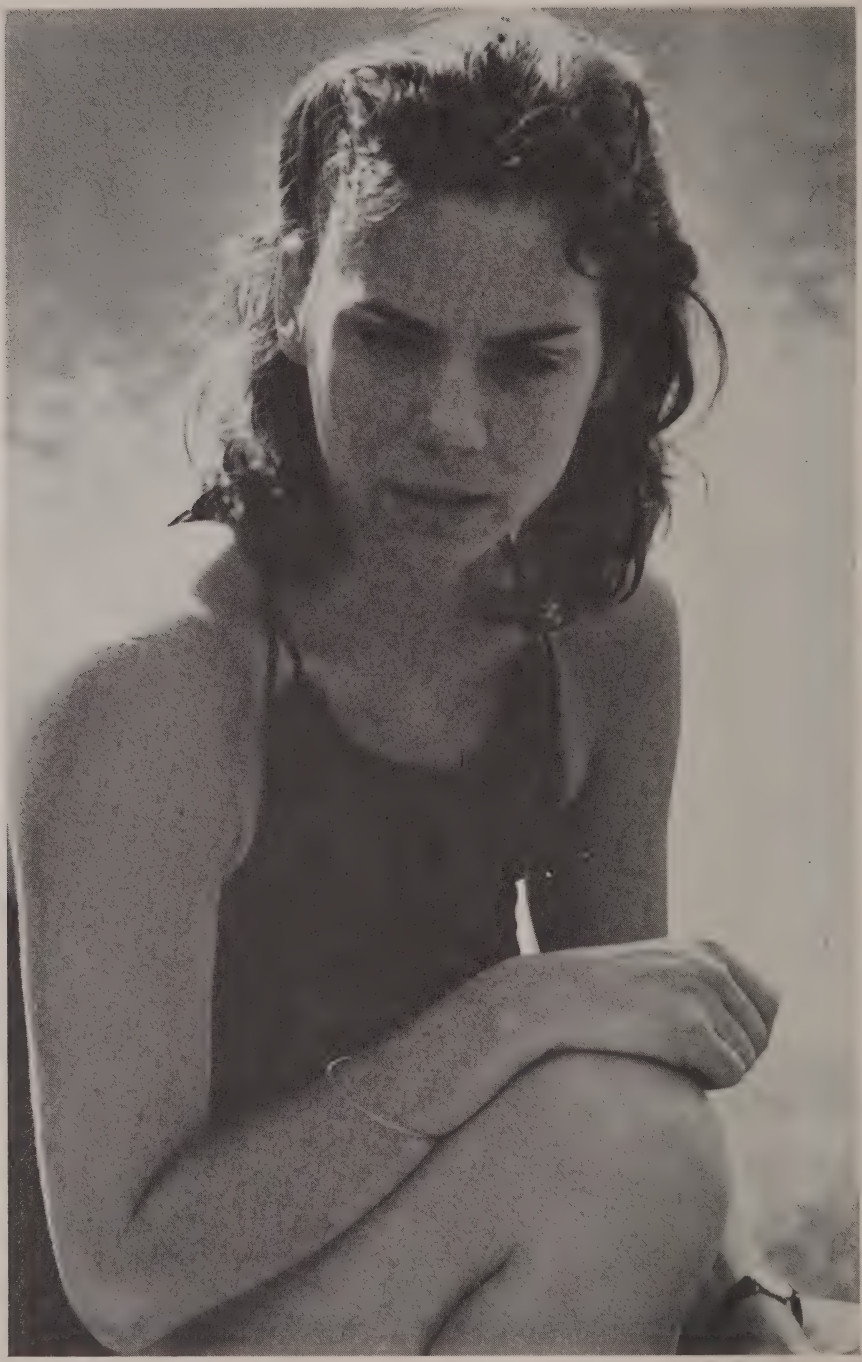
FIP: I have been told that the Riverdale Zen Community practices a different school of Zen that what is practiced here at the monastery. I believe it is the Soto school. Can you tell me what the difference is?

BEN: The basic difference is that the Rinzai school demands more discipline, while the Soto school is perhaps a little less rigid in its requirements for perfectly quiet sitting during *zazen*. It appears that the Rinzai school demands the achievement of enlightenment as soon as possible, which of course is not possible. The Soto conception is that one may take one's time in getting there, because no sooner is one there than one realizes that one is absolutely nowhere. I am not being paradoxical nor enigmatical. That is Zen.

DENKO'S JOURNEY

"My journey into the world of Zen Buddhism began eleven years ago while I was still a student at the University of Denmark. Up until that moment in my life I had no questions that needed answers. Society had laid out a course that I had to follow, and so long as I followed it I did not come across any problems. Then, I began to suspect some great conspiracy — that society was attempting to force me to conform to its thoughts, its way, its path. It began as an imperceptible ripple of discontent, which grew in intensity, until it appeared that it was my will pitted against the collective will of society. I remember one day that I was forced to stop and listen to the inner desire of my being. It was asking me whether I was doing these things for myself or whether society was compelling me to continue for its own benefit. This was the beginning of the great search for who I was and what I wanted to accomplish with my life. Yet it was in the process of attempting to figure out this question that I nearly drove myself mad. I began to believe that I was the *craziest* man in Denmark. At about this time I came across D.T. Suzuki's writings on Zen, and I began to feel that these were words that meant something to me, they spoke to the innermost recesses of my being. I also felt that I was not really crazy, but misplaced. So I decided to go to Japan to study under the great masters. I arrived in Japan and went to Kamaguwa and at the monastery there I told the monk that I had just arrived from Denmark and that I wanted to study Zen. He told me that I should return to my hotel and enjoy my stay in Japan. I felt that he did not understand what I was talking about. So I told him that I had come to study Zen and that I did not want to stay in a hotel since we had hotels in Denmark. I was firmly resolved to stand my ground until I got what I wanted. They sent a student who took me to the police. The police in Japan are very understanding, and if you come to them with a problem they feel it is their obligation to help you solve it. So after the student who accompanied me to the police told them that I wanted to stay at a Zen monastery, they immediately set about finding and calling all the monasteries. Finally, Ryutaku-ji said that they would allow me to stay there. So the police took me to the train station, bought me a ticket, and wished me a safe journey.

I remember arriving at Ryutaku-ji just as the sun was setting. I remember seeing a number of large calligraphies hanging from the monastery and gently blowing in the evening breeze. While I stayed there, I began to think that D.T. Suzuki never mentioned how painful the experience of learning Zen Buddhism or practicing *zazen* would be. I remember in my pain that I wanted to lean on something to relieve the suffering, but the walls were made of paper. While there, I asked Soen Roshi how to do *zazen*. He simply answered, "I do not know, I have not yet found out".



ANDREA MASTERS ON "NOW"

ANDREA: I came into contact with Zen when I was a young girl; I was about ten years old. There was a very good friend of the family, Louise Padelford, who was one of several people to take an avid interest in Zen Buddhism well before it became fashionable. She was the daughter of a senator, very wealthy and influential. She became a Buddhist, and thereafter spent a great deal of time and money in bringing over Japanese Zen masters to the United States.

I am an Episcopalian who has since preferred following the tenets of Zen rather than continuing the established religion into which I was born. It was about two years ago, approximately the same time that my friend died; another friend married a Zen Buddhist who knew of Eido Roshi. Louise Padelford also knew Eido Roshi and he knew of her, as I was to learn afterwards. It appeared that there were events occuring over which I had no understanding. A path was being opened to me and all I could do was follow it. So I found out about the monastery and came up. I found it to be very interesting, especially since I had relinquished any pretense about conventional western religions. I found that Zen provided me with a way of orienting myself and helping me to establish a sense of inner calm, which I had never been able to achieve before. I feel that I must mention at this point that there remain certain concepts of Zen which I do not fully subscribe to. I am not particularly entertained by the thoughts of eternal life nor of recurring *karma.* I attempted to increase my knowledge of Zen through Kapleau's book, *The Three Pillars of Zen.*

FIP: Can you go into some detail about your first *sesshin*?

ANDREA: Firstly, a *sesshin* is a period of intensive meditation. They are held a number of times during the year and they usually last anywhere between one and seven days. The meaning of *sesshin,* and a very literal translation of it is "to collect or regulate the mind." I did not know what to expect from my first *sesshin* so I did not worry too much about it. I was aware of the ground rules, but that was about it. I knew that one was not

allowed to speak to anyone, unless it was absolutely essential. We were not supposed to read or write, but those were only suggested rules, and I doubt if everyone kept to those rules. The main point of the *sesshin* is to concentrate on one's meditation, whether it be a *koan* or simply one's breathing. I remember that, as the *sesshin* approached, my sense of well-being began to fade and was replaced by a gnawing and pervading sense of anxiety. Questions raced through my mind. Questions for which it was impossible to find any answers. The answers would come, I felt, but only after having experienced the *sesshin*. I wish that I had known, or at least been acquainted with, some of the people there; I may have been able to placate some of the fears. Unfortunately, there was no one I knew well enough to ask simple questions like: "Will it hurt?" or, "What will I feel afterwards?" Nothing. No one. I would have to wait.

Finally, it began. I remember waking that morning at 4:30 A.M., and wondering what in the world was I doing at this ridiculous hour. An hour at which most people are still fast asleep. Here I was waking up to do something that I had never done before and could not possible anticipate the results until I tried it.

FIP: Can you remember the first sitting and what occurred?

ANDREA: I remember it very well. One does not forget that much physical pain that quickly, even though it was over two years ago. No sooner had we entered the *zendo*, the place of meditation, and sat as comfortably as possible, than the bell was rung and the meditation began. But as soon as we started, I could feel a wave of panic rushing from my stomach; my mind raced ahead full steam. I felt as though I would scream. I calmed myself as best I could and remained absolutely immobile and hoped for the best. Very soon my legs began to tingle, but for fear that I would disturb the others I did not shift my position; the pain started almost imperceptibly. But very quickly I realized that I was in trouble. I was forced to feel the torture consciously, minute after minute. There was no comfort. Only the thought that it would be over sustained me through the first period. Finally the bell sounded and a rush of relief enveloped me; the sense of elation was marvelous. But that was only the end of the first period and there was still a great deal of meditation to do.

FIP: How long was the first day?

ANDREA: It lasted about eight hours. That first day will always be permanently etched in my mind as one when I had to endure an inordinate amount of physical pain. However, it was on the second day that I began to hallucinate and see Buddha. I felt that I was going crazy and, worse yet, was presuming that everyone else was crazy, too. Then at night I would retire to my room and literally collapse in a state of exhaustion, but unable to find the solace of sleep because every single muscle in my body ached.

The pain was strident, stinging, and radiated from a knot in my stomach to the extremities of my body. I was no longer able to rationalize my presence at the monastery. I began to question my sanity. I knew that the *sesshin* would be difficult; I did not expect the intensity of the pain which would be required for enlightenment.

FIP: When did the pain begin to subside?

ANDREA: To this day the pain has not subsided. I don't mean that I am still suffering from my first *sesshin*, I mean that it is still painful to sit for extended periods of time. However, the sense that I was not crazy and that there was something to all this sitting came sometime near the very end of the *sesshin.* I remember very distinctly that the pain was constantly present and that the rain was incessant. But instead of the quiet pitter-patter of the raindrops, it seemed as though each drip was a thunderclap which exploded in my head. I was hallucinating and unable to control the thoughts which passed through my mind. Then, at some point — I cannot precisely determine at what moment — there appeared a great sweeping wave over my entire being. I seemed to have been raised to another plane of consciousness. It is a difficult moment to express in words. All I know is that my reasons for being at the monastery became perfectly clear. The path upon which I had embarked became reasonable instead of irrational. The pain momentarily subsided, and I experienced a sense of elation that I have never been able to recapture. However, the most important thing is that I felt an enormous surge of energy. A source of energy had been tapped, a source which I never knew I possessed.

FIP: How long did it last?

ANDREA: About three or four weeks. During that period I felt that there was nothing that I could not do. I lived a very intense life during those weeks. It was as though I was consciously aware of things which were occurring, I could perceive the unknowable. I felt that I knew of things which others did not know. It felt as though someone had lifted a veil which had been covering my eyes and that for the first time I was seeing things as they actually were rather than as I perceived them to be. Well, eventually, the energy dissipated and I returned to a more or less normal state of energy.

FIP: Did you ever manage to recapture that sense of well-being as the one you *experienced after your first sesshin*?

ANDREA: Personally, I have tried many times to recapture those moments or weeks of intense energy. I have failed to feel the same way as I did then. I have been on other *sesshins*, but to no avail. I consider myself fortunate, however, to have experienced it once. There have been other moments, but they have been brief and fleeting.

FIP: Have you ever had the opportunity of speaking to Eido Roshi about your experience during *sesshin*?

ANDREA: There are specific moments during *sesshin* which are reserved for a meeting with the roshi. They are called *Dokusan.* Actually, that is the name of the room in which you meet with the roshi. These are personal one-to-one meetings with the roshi during which he offers words of encouragement or disapproval, considering what you deserve. Traditionally, one is asked where one is with one's *koan*. One usually hasn't got a clue as to where one is with one's *koan*, that is a judgment that is reserved for the roshi, who actually feels that you have or have not arrived at the suitable answer.

I was in a state of total confusion. I had no idea whether to speak, or not to speak. I felt extremely vulnerable, very exposed; I felt as though he would look right through me. No sooner had I sat down than I realized that he *really* did know something, and I, in turn, felt that it was all right. I had always felt highly suspicious about things like that. But, with Eido Roshi, it seemed natural. He then said something inscrutable and profound, and I was very affected by his perspicacity. Not only were his words wise, they were extremely accurate. I had seen Eido Roshi walking about the monastery and in the *zendo* during meditation and also at meals, but there in the *Dokusan* I saw him as I had never seen him before. He appeared sagacious, as only orientals can be. Westerners can be wise, but only the orientals can be sagacious. They seem to obtain a wisdom from within which they seem to have monopolized for thousands of years. I saw him with an aura of love and compassion which I had never witnessed before. I was so profoundly moved by it that I was unable to say what I had planned.

FIP: This has all had a significant effect on you. Where do you feel you are with your practice of Zen?

ANDREA: It has definitely had an effect and imprinted its meaning on me. I feel, however, that I have one foot in and one foot out. This simply means that I could not embrace a monastic life. However, on the other hand, I have been able to see that I am entirely capable of bringing my experience from the monastery and using it in my daily life. I still practice *zazen* at the New York City *zendo* sporadically, and I find that it helps to keep me centered. There is something that I would like to say, and it most defintely ties in with the Zen experience. I mentioned earlier in the interview that I found it extremely difficult to accept the concept of eternal life and recurrent *karma*. I would like to say that there is possibly another life. But then again, this life or that life — what does it matter? I have even considered the fact that time does not exist, and that there is nothing else than "now." Since I realize that I exist in the "now," then there is something that I can do about my life right "now." I also know that if I don't do anything about "now," then nothing is likely to happen.

KOANS

FROM UMMON'S GOLDEN WIND

A monk asked Ummon, "What will happen when the leaves fall and the trees become bare?"
Ummon said, "Golden Wind!"

•

A monk asked Ummon, "What is the kind of talk that transcends Buddhas and Patriarchs?"
Ummon replied, "Rice cake!"

•

A monk asked Ummon, "What is Ummon's melody?"
Ummon replied, "The twenty-fifth of December!"

•

A monk asked Ummon, "What is the *samadhi* of each individual thing?"
Ummon replied, "Rice in bowl, water in pail!"

•

A monk asked Ummon, "What is Buddha?"
Ummon replied, "Toilet paper!"

•

A monk asked Ummon, "No thoughts have risen. Are there any faults or not?"
Ummon said, "Mount Sumeru!"

•

Ummon said to his disciples, "I do not ask you to say anything about before the fifteenth day of the month, but say something about after the fifteenth day of the month."
Because no monk could reply, Ummon answered himself and said, "Every day is a good day!"

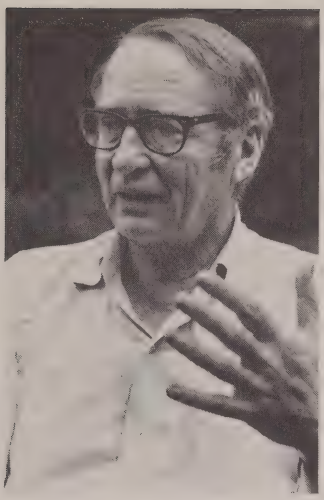
•

Golden Wind: Zen Talks, by Eido Shimano Roshi; Japan Publications, Inc., Tokyo, Japan, 1979

NANCY AND GUS BALLARD

GUS: I believe I can speak for my wife and myself as we are both from the same generation. In our generation we were expected to follow a certain course of life, and that usually came through parental direction or example. I do not find that that pattern has held in what may be termed — for the lack of a better term — the "sixties" generation. Our son Gus, who received the dharma name of "Kanna", was born in 1949, and therefore his most significant growing years took place in the sixties. As parents of the previous generation, we had the opportunity of accepting the fact that our children were going to pursue their own lives, or else of fighting them. If parents choose to fight, the end result often leads them and the children to unhappiness. Although I doubt very much that we would have selected the vocation of a Zen Buddhist monk as the ideal lifestyle for our eldest son, we are aware that he has found peace of mind and happiness. One may conceive of all sorts of fates befalling Kanna's generation. It was a period of transition, of rebellion, of established opinions and traditions being swept away and new tides washing new ideas ashore. They were difficult times to grow up in. We both feel very grateful that he was able to select a path which has provided him with so much peace.

NANCY: I should like to add something which I feel very strongly about



ON THEIR SON "KANNA"

that is especially due to the fact that I am a mother of two "sixties" children. I really feel that we, as parents, did not cease to be educated. I feel that many persons of my generation felt that once into adulthood, one no longer required the elements of open-mindedness, that somehow one reached an all-knowingness, an omniscience about how to raise children and act accordingly. This is indeed one of the great myths, and because it is a myth it has assumed legendary proportions. Our children's lives acted as catalysts to our own and through them we were able to continue to grow as a family. In retrospect, I see that this did not occur without strife and hardship. I can say that it was well worth it, very educational and very broadening for the both of us.

FIP: Things must have been very different for you when you were growing up.

NANCY: Yes, they were, However, they were very much simpler. We did what we were told. I was the youngest of three daughters, and if we rebelled — if one can call it that — it was a very mild form of rebellion. I recall that my most ambitious act of rebellion was going to a ball in an evening dress with tennis sneakers on. That was a very outrageous thing to do, but mild in comparison to what happens today. Much of what has happened to

Kanna has rubbed off on us, and I find that it is a terribly exciting experience to come here to the monastery. The more I come here, the more I learn about it.

FIP: Was Kanna's attraction to Zen Buddhism gradual?

GUS: Our son did very well in his undergraduate studies. However, he had trouble getting into a graduate program in psychology. Finally, he was accepted at NYU in the graduate experimental psychology program, which was not what he wanted — he would have preferred to be in clinical psychology. At some point in 1978, he attended a lecture on Zen. It must have made an impression on him, because in 1979 he asked me for an advance to go somewhere in upstate New York for a Zen *sesshin*, which was supposed to be for a month. He stayed for a year and a half.

FIP: Had Kanna been interested in religion?

GUS: Not really. He had been taking courses in comparative religion and theology, but had never been a practicing person. He did not go to church. However, he was very concerned with what made us tick. He was constantly searching for the ingredient which would allow for some adjustment to reality and ultimately to happiness. Returning to your question on Kanna's attraction to Buddhism, I would have to say that it was gradual, but the moment of truth was when the person came to NYU and gave the lecture on Zen. This was probably the moment when the door was unlocked for him.

NANCY: There is one other point about Kanna, quite a significant point. He was forever obsessed with the truth. He demanded it of himself and others.

FIP: What occurred during the year and a half that he was at Dai Bosatsu? Was there any communication between you?

GUS: It must be about three years ago, we came up to Dai Bosatsu and spent a weekend. Then by the summer of 1980 he asked to be ordained as a monk. However, one or two days before the ceremony, he decided not to do it and left for California and stayed with his sister. During the summer of 1981 he fell very ill, and required two major operations. He came very close to not making it. When he recovered from his illness, he had developed a very firm resolve to return to the monastery. A tremendously firm resolve. He remained in California so as to save sufficient funds to be able to return and was finally ordained two months ago.

NANCY: I remember very distinctly when our son called and said, "I'm a monk." Neither Gus nor myself were surprised by it, we had been gradually introduced to the fact that it might occur, so I feel that that is why we have our own peace of mind. We knew all along that he was searching for something, and now we feel that he has finally found it.

FIP: Was it any more difficult to accept the fact that your son became a Zen Buddhist monk rather than a Roman Catholic priest or a Protestant minister?

GUS: My own personal views on this matter are predicated on my own personal history. As a child I believe that I received an overdose of religion. My father was a religious man who instilled us with a very strong religious upbringing. I attended St. George's School in Newport, Rhode Island, and we had to attend chapel every day. But those were different times; conventionality was rampant, and so was religion. The point which we are discussing is vocation and not dogma, it is a lifestyle which is chosen or more specifically one which one is called to do. I doubt very much whether the trappings of one religion are the major considerations in the selection of a vocation. It is simply not the question of exoticism over conventionality, it is to do that which one is comfortable with, nothing more, nothing less.

In thinking about my son's choice, I now see that it was easier for me to make the adjustment to Buddhism than it would have been had he decided to become a priest or a minister. As soon as Buddhism was introduced into our household, both Nancy and myself realized that the question was to understand, rather than attempt to enforce parameters of behavior. That it was much more important and that the consequences would be more far-reaching if we accepted what Kanna wanted to do rather than having us tell him what to do.

FIP: To see the direction your son was taking required understanding?

GUS: We are both parents of a different generation. For us to understand what he was doing required unconditional understanding and a shift in our own attitudes. We had to examine our own rigidity and unwillingness to accept the things that we could not understand. This demanded a great deal of tolerance on our part. Yet now, as the years have passed, we can see that the rewards have been great.

FIP: Was there anything fearful about Kanna becoming actually committed to Zen?

GUS: I still feel that he would not have joined a religion which did not possess a certain degree of flexibility. I admit that there is apparently an enormous amount of rigorous training involved. However, I feel that it is entirely voluntary. The stringent requirements which bind the Catholic priest are not apparent. The exercise of free will is very comfortable in Zen.

NANCY: It appears that Kanna is much more suited intellectually and emotionally to Zen Buddhism than he would be in any other religious order. He had a number of friends who were Catholic, and although I know that he

never denigrated their faith, I feel that he could not accept their beliefs. The precepts of Buddhism are as close to Christianity as anything I have come across.

FIP: What you are saying is that it is ritualistic, yet not dogmatic?

GUS: That is exactly it. Many times I tried to understand the concepts of Buddhism, but it was always clashing with my preconceptions of other religions and the demands that they made. I spoke to my son about them. I asked, "What if sometime in the future you realize that this is not what you want to do? What then?" He answered quietly and with great assurance that these were not the commitments which were required in Buddhism. This is why I can truly understand why he chose this path instead of any other.

FIP: It appears as though you as parents have managed to learn something from your son's experience. How can you sum it all up?

GUS: Happiness is contingent upon helping others. The tragedy which most often occurs is that we take our own families for granted, and as parents we feel that because we have lived our lives we feel that this is the way our children should live theirs. It is simply a myth to believe that parents have all the answers, and it is even a greater fallacy that parents believe that they have all the answers. In our case, we had to shift our attention away from ourselves and attempt to understand what our son wanted to do. We often talk about shifting our attitude, but how often it happens that we simply shift it even further in the opposite direction. These shifts must show up not on our lips, but in our lives. As soon as we realized that our son's happiness was more important than imitating our lives, it became possible to comprehend the meaning of happiness. Had we done anything less than that, we would have been headed for trouble.

NANCY: I have seen it happen in so many other lives. A child must grow and become an adult with his or her own set of values. To deter them from that pursuit is to deny them the right of their own opinions. To deny them of their own opinions is to curtail their potential as human beings. It is as detrimental for a parent to do too little as it is for them to do too much. The art of being a parent is to balance, harmonize, and seek to fulfill, rather than have one's children emulate.

GUS: I remember there was a friend of mine whom I went to law school with. I had without coercion chosen my profession. This friend of mine was needled into law by his father. His father constantly urged him onwards, stretching him to the limits. Well, one day, because he was no longer able to continue, he took his own life. That is tragic. That is an indication of the pernicious effect that parents can have on their children. It is likewise the same if a parent totally relinquishes all control over his or her children. There must be a balance for all concerned.

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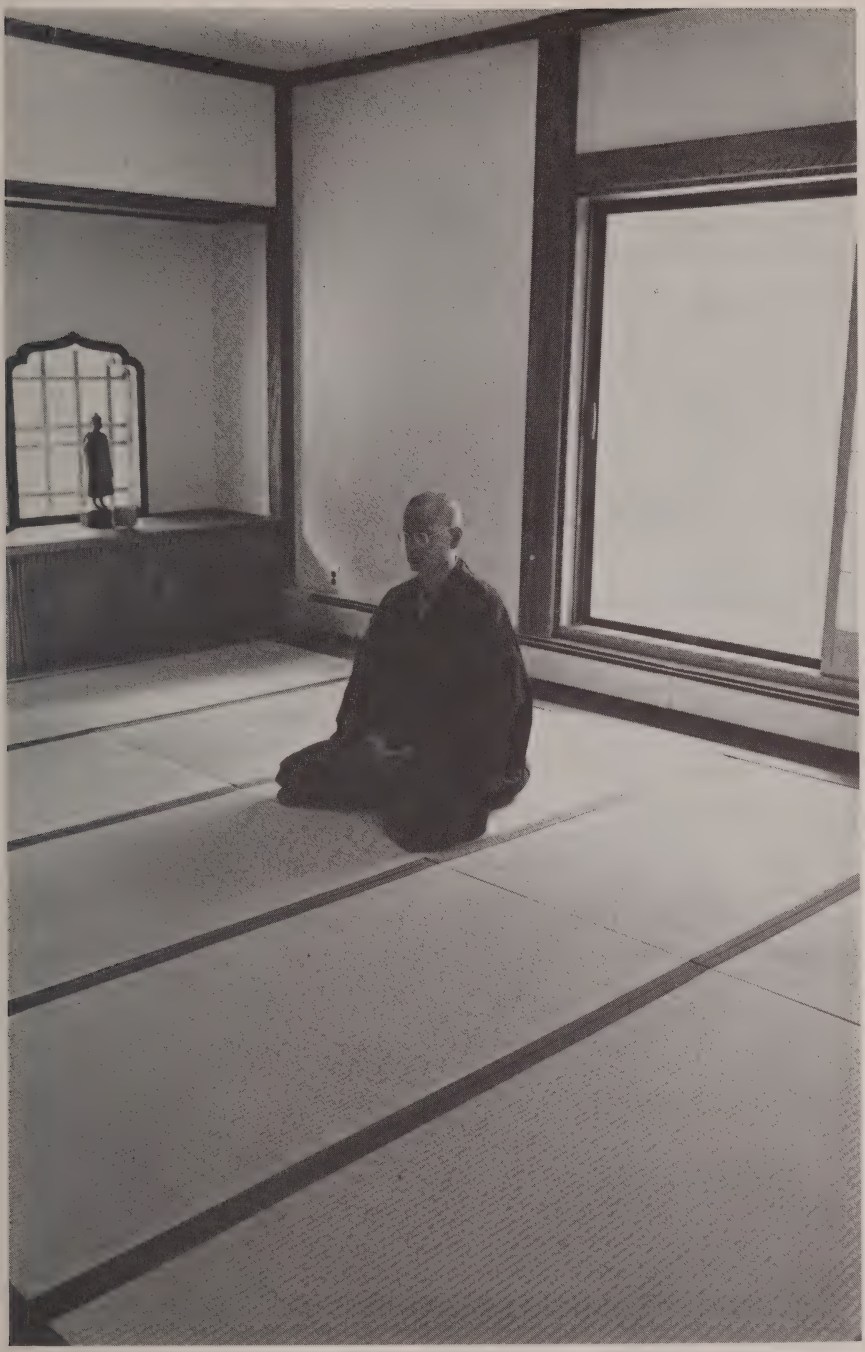
"KANNA" ON BECOMING A MONK

FIP: How does a young man from Main Line Philadelphia not only get involved with Zen Buddhism, but eventually wind up being ordained as a monk?

KANNA: That is an interesting question, which surprisingly does not have an answer. One may attempt to reconstruct one's past to find out why one is doing what one is doing. But I question the viability of such a procedure. Because I see today that had I made one other decision in my life, one ever so slight alteration, things may not have occurred as they are. However, the point, in fact, is that they did occur as they have. I am currently "now" at Dai Bosatsu and am an ordained monk. However, I shall attempt to place my life in some sort of historical perspective so as to answer your question.

I believe that I first heard of Zen Buddhism when I was pretty young. My parents travelled in a very eclectic and avant-garde group of intellectuals who must have left around a book by D.T. Suzuki, which I eventually read out of curiosity. That perhaps sparked my interest. But it is strange how other facets of Zen crept into my life. For example, the comedian, Shelley Berman, once mentioned the koan of "the sound of one hand clapping" on one of his records. I happen to remember that quite distinctly. The oddity was the juxtaposition of the seriousness of Zen and the levity of its being on a comedy record. I also remember reading about the koan



on Joshu's "Mu." All of these small, apparently insignificant facts became indelibly etched on my mind, awaiting the moment to surface.

FIP: Do you remember having anything but a regular academic education?

KANNA: No, there was absolutely nothing irregular about my education. There were no parochial schools to influence my religious beliefs. I went to a private school in Philadelphia, and then went on to college. I went to the Philadelphia College of Art and then to the University of Pennsylvania.

FIP: What did you major in while at the University?

KANNA: I had originally started off as an artist, which helped to satisfy my creative urge. However, I required something more substantial, something which would provide me with a career orientation and be intellectually stimulating. It was at the University that I decided upon psychology with a minor in philosophy. My eventual plan was to be an analyst. I realize now that I was studying as much for my own self-illumination as I was for others'.

FIP: What happened after the University?

KANNA: I attempted to get into graduate school to study clinical psychology. Nothing was available. However, NYU accepted me into its graduate course in experimental psychology. I was rather despondent about studying something which, although it was interesting, was not what I wanted to do. What is significant about my studies at NYU is that it was there that I met a woman who had spent three years in a Zen monastery in Japan. She possessed a certain demeanor, a quality of peace, which greatly impressed me. It appeared that all which had been dormant about Zen now resurfaced. My interest in the subject blossomed and I indulged in a great deal of reading on the subject. The subject appealed to me and I wanted to know more about it. I was continually asking this woman about Zen, so she referred me to the New York City Zendo and mentioned that there they would teach me about meditation and *zazen*. So I went there and learned about meditation and practiced *zazen*. Then, one day while I was at the *zendo,* I noticed a piece of paper tacked to the bulletin board that said, "Applications now being accepted for *kessei*, write to Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji."

FIP: Were you that interested in Zen at that moment that you were willing to go on a three-month intensive meditation?

KANNA: I was not at all pleased with the way my studies were progressing. I felt that I had reached an impasse, and I was contemplating the possibility of dropping out of school. I was, in fact, crumbling. My sense of self-worth had completely disappeared. I no longer possessed a direction or goal,

I no longer knew who I was or what I wanted to do, so the application was much more than just a retreat for me. It appeared to be a way, perhaps even a path. I was in a desperate situation which required action, so I applied and was accepted.

FIP: What year was that?

KANNA: If my memory serves me correctly, it was in March of 1979. I really knew nothing else about Dai Bosatsu except that it was a monastery in the Catskills. I had previously seen the article in the *New York Times* magazine which left me with a favorable impression. But I knew nothing else.

FIP: Did you come up by yourself?

KANNA: There were a few of us from the New York City Zendo. I recognized a few of them, but I did not know these people.

FIP: What was your first impression arriving at Dai Bosatsu?

KANNA: Firstly, that it was much more elaborate than I expected. I believe that I expected something in the form of a barn, very primitive. The accommodations were much nicer than I expected. I also thought that the people at the monastery would be saintly and evolved. They were not at all like I thought. I had anticipated a group of people who were aloof from the preoccupations of the materialistic world, people whose lives had been adjusted and lived harmoniously amongst themselves. I also thought that the atmosphere would be devoid of jealousy, anger, greed, etc. . . etc. That was simply not the case. I found people who were just like me : confused and searching. But there was one common denominator: we were willing and teachable.

But that did not exactly make things much easier for me. I was still in doubt as to why I was here. But in many ways I was not surprised to be in doubt, nor was I particularly upset when I found that I was in constant pain during *zazen*. I remember repeating constantly to myself that I am at the bottom, and that I must do what I am doing for no other reason than to do it. I constantly repeated this, and the effect was that it helped to relieve the burden of the doubt.

FIP: How long has it taken you to become comfortable with the monastic routine?

KANNA: Occasionally, and only rarely, do I feel that I am approaching anything which may be termed "the fruits of living a monastic life." Sometimes I have an insight as to what I am doing. I mean that I *really* know. But that never lasts long. But at least I am aware of it. It is an odd sort of sensation, which may not appeal to an outsider. It is not the dramatic

religious experience of mystics that I am talking about. It is the simple feeling that one receives while one is cooking or cleaning or doing some other chore. It is a sense of accomplishment. Total output equals total input. It is a sense of balance. I have been practicing *zazen* for three and a half years and have been at the monastery for two years, and I am beginning to feel that I know what I am doing. That is indeed very precious.

FIP: Were there ever any recurrent doubts as to whether you had made the correct choice?

KANNA: I began to realize that Zen is a celebration of the self, yet that was insufficient for me, in the beginning, anyhow. After the initial *kessei*, which lasted for three months, I remained at the monastery for twelve more months. Then, a great fear possessed me. A fear that I was staying here because I could not make it on the outside. So I made a decision that if I was going to become more deeply involved it would not make any difference if I left. So I left the community. I proceeded to return to where I had left off. I attempted to get involved with clinical psychology. It proved to be very interesting, as I ended up working in a treatment center for profoundly disturbed people, which also provided me a way of transcending my past. I also did various and sundry odd jobs, like panning for gold in California, a printing apprenticeship, and a job at a residential treatment program in Jungian psychology. Then while I was in California, I fell very seriously ill. In retrospect, I see that it was a deep psychological conflict that was going on. The question of whether I should return or continue on the outside loomed larger than life, and I could not resolve it. The struggle was unbearable, and I fell deathly ill with peritonitis and nearly died. But at the end of the conflict, I was resolved to return to Dai Bosatsu.

FIP: Your ordination has been relatively recent?

KANNA: It was on April 10th. And nothing much has changed, except for the fact that I am existentially aware of who I am. I am now a monk. But I do not know who I am absolutely. However, there has been a clear diminution of my anxiety level since my return to Dai Bosatsu. In becoming a monk, certain responsibilities are elicited from the individual, which eventually make him a more reliable person. The vows that are taken are binding vows. These vows in turn allow one to see oneself as one truly is and allow you to make the correct decisions and change your attitude. There happens to be great encouragement in this monastic life. Not only is it a contemplative life, it is a life in which one's entire being becomes evolved and every aspect of the self becomes the object of scrutiny and definition.

FIP: Just one last question. Why do you shave your head?

KANNA: To cut away all delusions.

KOTOBUKI — "LONG LIFE" by DAIKU ROSHI at age ninety-five from SCROLLS OF THE ZEN MASTERS from the collection of the Zen Studies Society, the parent organization of Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji and the New York City Zendo Shobo-ji.

Conversation with the Master

SHIMANO EIDO ROSHI ON "THE FARTHEST JOURNEY"

Shimano Eido Roshi is first and foremost a samurai, a warrior in the true sense of the word. The samurai ideal of a union of beauty and energy is dramatically present in his life and teaching.

But at the same time that he is warriorlike and severe, he is fatherly and kind. Born in the month of October, under the astrological sign of Libra, which symbolizes balance and harmony, he seems constantly to be reconciling extremes not only in others and in external situations, but in himself as well. This makes him well suited to the task of establishing a strong root for Zen in America. It also causes him to appear enigmatic,

both to others and to himself. "I am a bit puzzled by myself, too," he says, laughing heartily.

Indeed, a "true man without rank", Eido Roshi is without fixed qualities. Born in the Year of the Monkey, he becomes and reflects others so accurately they feel as if in the presence of a mirror image of themselves.

Although many, many people participated in the establishment of International Dai Bosatsu Zendo, without a master like Eido Roshi the concrete realization of their hopes and dreams would probably never have taken place.

— Louis Nordstrom

FIP: I have had the opportunity of reading *Namu Dai Bosa* and have been able to gain a historical perspective of the transmission of Zen Buddhism to America. However, the story ends in 1976. What has happened since that time at the International Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji?

EIDO ROSHI: After the monastery was completed in 1976 and the dedication ceremony was held, we realized that the first thing which had to be done was to establish the monastic routine based on the Japanese tradition. Yet at the same time we had to introduce a certain flexibiity which would be adaptable to the American personality, and at the same time would remain true to the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism. The questions which arose were the most simple and basic ones yet they were the most important. For example, were we going to chant the *sutras* in Japanese, Chinese, or English? Or, at meal times, were we going to sit in the traditional Japanese way or were tables and chairs necessary? All of these questions required answers, and to find an answer requires effort, and effort must be smoothed with the passage of time, and the passage of time requires patience, and patience requires experience. So the questions have been answered through experience, our greatest teacher. We also experimented with many things. We established six *sesshins,* so now after six years we have held over thirty-six of them and we have gained from the experience. At each *sesshin* we held a complementary program or workshop. So we have reached the conclusion, for the time being, that we are doing the correct thing and that things appear to be balanced. In the meantime we had to make decisions concerning the support of Dai Bosatsu. It is wonderful to have a monastery in America, but it must be self-supporting. So we had to continue to search for ways to do this. We began the manufacture and sale of maple syrup. We began our own garden so that we have our own vegetables. We began more programs. We also began the guest house *Jorakuan.* This is only a beginning. But I feel that the foundation is solid.

FIP: Since Dai Bosatsu opened its doors in 1976, do you feel that Americans have become more interested in the practice of Zen?

EIDO ROSHI: I think that, as far as the enthusiasm for Zen practice is concerned, there is a gradual yet perceptible increase throughout the United

States. But Dai Bosatsu has particular considerations which must be looked at. Primarily, we are an isolated community, far away from any metropolitan area. The winters are very severe, and to dedicate one's life to a monastic order is a difficult decision for anyone to make. However, it is ideal for someone who lives in New York or Washington or elsewhere to come for a retreat. That is perhaps the most ideal thing for them to do. There are few full-time residents here, but there are a number of commuting students.

FIP: There is a passage in "*Namu Dai Bosa*" where your master, Soen Roshi, told you that you must go to America to ensure the continuance of the dharma spirit of Zen Buddhism in the United States. Has it not been difficult at times?

EIDO ROSHI: I do not think that it is what *I* did, I believe that it was the readiness of the time. My personal feeling is that I was involved in the timing. Of being present at the right time and in the right place. It appears that America is in more need of spiritual cohesiveness than ever before. The time is ripening, and Americans in general are becoming more and more conscious of a deep and wide knowledge toward oriental countries. They have found and realized that there is something lacking in this country yet there is something which exists elsewhere. So I think that Americans are gradually finding something more than what they have had. The real difficulty for Western society is to overcome its skepticism. The nature of Zen Buddhism is so exotic that barriers are thrown up and defiance sets in. These are deterrents to understanding. But once they take the opportunity of being willing to understand that which is new to them — but old to us — then a transformation takes place. They gradually begin to see and realize the significance of this type of lifestyle.

FIP: One of the common denominators which we have been able to identify since we have been here is the necessity and desire for commitment.

EIDO ROSHI: I feel that unless we commit ourselves, not only to Zen, but to anything in life, then we cannot expect to get anything out of it. But then there naturally arises the question, "How do we know whether this is a worthwhile commitment?" Naturally if we feel that it is worthwhile, then we will commit, otherwise we will not. But this kind of commitment does not come from mental judgment. It arrives from intuitive feeling. We find that this is something. This "it" demands our dedication, commitment, and through it we learn something. So commitment is indispensable.

FIP: There has also been another element introduced into the conversations we have been having, that is the element of conflict. The conflict that the students have been talking about is the one of transcending material possessions and the ego against the non-ego. Is it any more likely that the oriental will suffer less from this than the westerner?

EIDO ROSHI: Perhaps this is true. However, I have been in this country for over twenty years and it is now difficult for me to speak for the oriental. Generally speaking, the oriental is not as aggressive as the American. Neither is the oriental as egocentric as the American. This is not intended to be derogatory, it is only a comparison. Here in America it is very important to express one's opinion, to express who one is either verbally or materially. It is extremely important to be recognized and to be successful. But we are all individuals, not general segments of the population.

But I, too, still have that conflict within me, and it happens to be partly a cultural conflict. Insofar as we begin to understand that whether we are American or Japanese, so long as we are human beings we will always have some kind of existential ego. We must begin to comprehend the fact that there is no such thing as ego or self. Existentially speaking, there is you and I; both aspects exist simultaneously. Most people believe that there is the ego world and the ego-less world. We dream to pursue the ego-less world, and we feel that someday through persistence we can overcome our egos. However, to resolve this conflict it is imperative to understand that the ego world exists at the same time as the ego-less world. Once that is *really* understood, then the conflict resolves itself. No one can go out and tell people that there is a way to resolve this; people simply do not want to know. That is why they have problems. The moment they want to find out, then there are ways for them to seek a path upon which they will find, perhaps, what they are looking for. But it takes time. So they must struggle and they must suffer until the moment comes when they will cease to struggle and cease to suffer.

FIP: Do you have any ideas about where Dai Bosatsu Zendo will be going in the future?

EIDO ROSHI: No one knows. I feel that we shall continue just the way we have been doing. Perhaps in the future, historians will look back and say that Dai Bosatsu was needed, and that Dai Bosatsu worked in the proper way. However, in the midst of discussing this point, I am not opposed to the Americanization of Zen, yet I feel that were it to occur too suddenly and dramatically it would be detrimental to the transmission of Zen. Dai Bosatsu was created in the true sense of the traditional Japanese monastery, and some people feel that it is overly Japanese in its rigid adherence to the observances of the monastic life. But I had no choice because it was the only way I knew how to do it. There has never been another way, and yet progressively this will change. In the next generation and generations that come there will be American roshis, and they will know what Americans need. But at the moment it is important that the people learn what traditional Zen Buddhism means. Within a few decades the transformation will have taken place, and Zen will be Americanized. But we should spend at least ten more years being stubbornly Japanese in our traditions.

FIP: Twenty-two years ago a young Zen monk arrived in the United States. That young monk's name was Shimano Eido; that alone takes a considerable amount of progressive thinking.

EIDO ROSHI: Sometimes I regret having come to the United States; it would have been a much easier life to remain in a monastery in Japan. But for some reason I came. I found many interesting people. There is no doubt that Americans are very interesting people. Americans are very childlike and have many excellent qualities and when they are in good moods they are wonderful to be with. However, when they are not in a good mood, they are terrible.

But it is the childlike qualities which are so important to Zen. This is why America has been so receptive to Zen Buddhism. However, because Americans are so zealous to make things happen, we must exercise caution. We must take it slowly and allow things to happen at their own pace. What appears to be Americanization must be understood. Zen itself has no frontiers, it is everywhere. There is no Indian Zen as such, neither is there Chinese or Japanese or American Zen as such. Fundamentally speaking, there is only one Zen. There are no countries. But culturally speaking there is such a thing as Chinese Zen and Japanese Zen. So there necessarily arises the necessity to see it from two different aspects: the existential and the fundamental. Fundamentally speaking, there has been no change whatsoever from Shakyamuni's time till now. However, existentially speaking, there are many differences. As a matter of fact, it is constantly changing. And all change takes time.

FIP: Somehow Dai Bosatsu marks the people who have come here. This is truly a special place.

EIDO ROSHI: This is a very unique place. By watching a deer or looking at the mountains and the lake, one begins to suspect that there is a spiritual feeling. I cannot help to feel the beauty and tranquility of Dai Bosatsu. Each time I come back from New York City, I am impressed by its wonder. I hope that in some ways the people who leave here are also impressed by this. It is the greatest treasure that they may possess. It is not a matter of intellectual comprehension, it is a matter of feeling. Yet Zen Buddhism is like a baby in this country. So many people think that this is some strange religion from the orient, or worse, they feel that it is some cult. There remain many misunderstandings. But this is one of the pains that we must have. But I often have to say, we do not persuade anyone to become a Zen Buddhist. Pursue not if he leaves, refuse not if he comes. This is the basic attitude we have. And more importantly, convert not unless he wants to. But you know that we will never have more people here than we are meant to have. It is not because Dai Bosatsu Zendo is so far from New York or Washington or California or from Tokyo. It is because the farthest journey is from the head to the heart.

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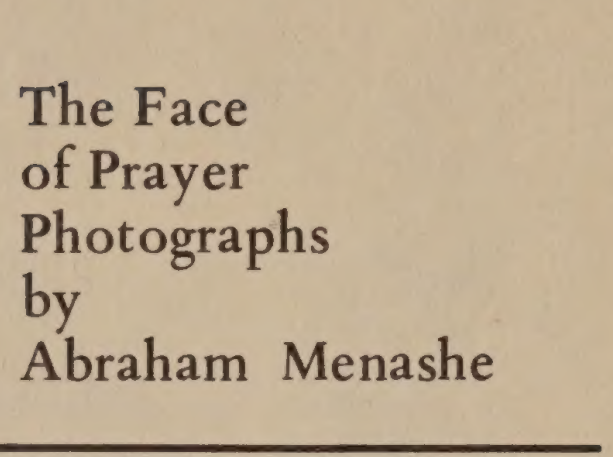

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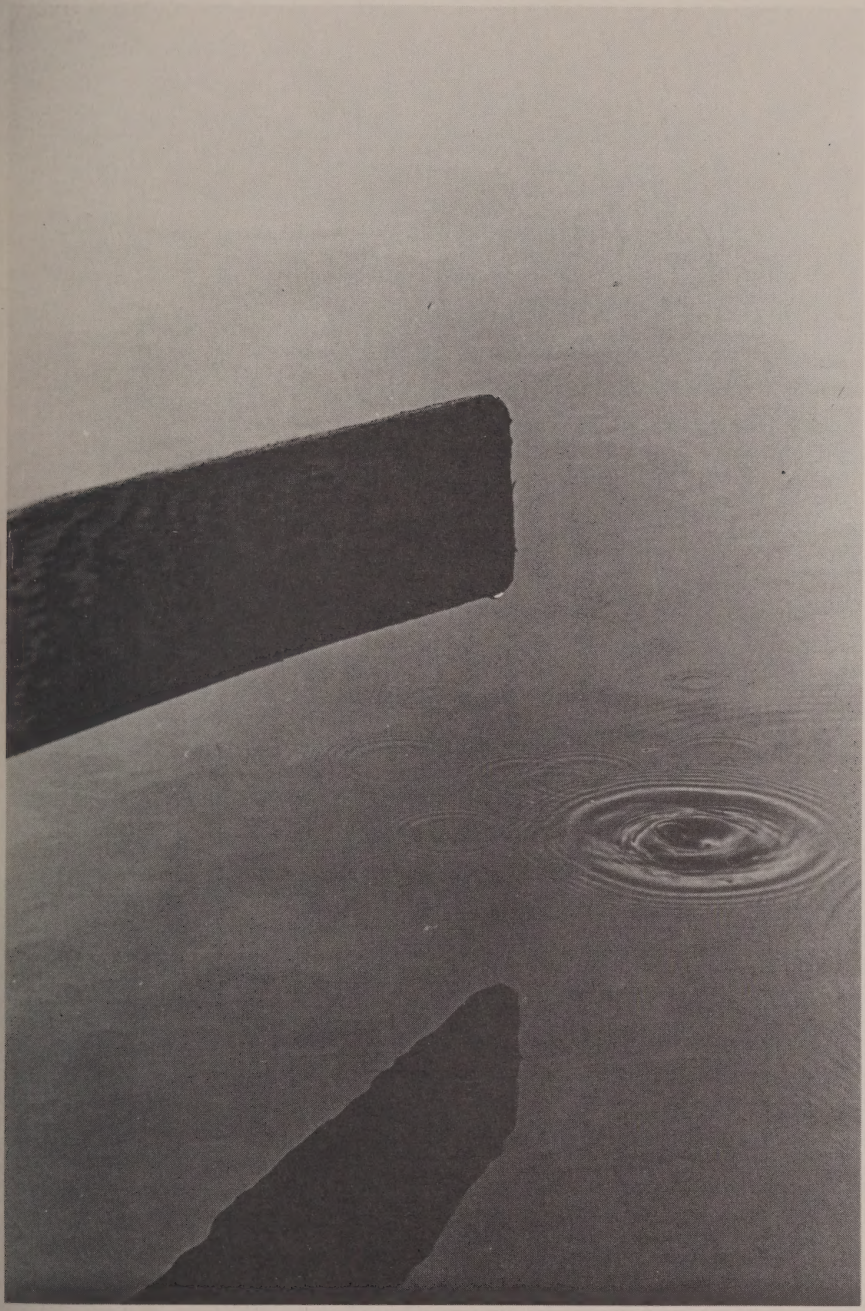

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